

The Process of Empowering Women of India

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Abstract

This paper captures the process of empowering women in India, it explores the programs for women and tracks the empowerment process in India since the birth of the nation, and the SDGs targets the government seeks to address through the programs. The paper has in detailed discuss the evolution of the empowerment process under the five-year plans, the paradigm shift from subject of welfare to partners in development.

Keywords

Empowerment, development plans and women, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Mahila Shakti Kendras.

Background

Indian women unlike in the Western world did not have to fight for legal and social rights, it was granted and guaranteed by the provisions of various articles under the constitution of India, at the time of birth of India as a nation.

The constitution of India has ensured women's rights and privileges. Several provisions of the constitution, importantly, Article 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39, 42 and 51 (A) (e) made sure to cover all the aspects of a woman's life. They received consideration in all the development plans and are central to India's growth story. Despite the guarantee of equality by the supreme law of the land, i.e. the constitution of India; women in India traditionally have not been accorded equal status to men.

With the evolution of India as a nation and economy, the status of women underwent change, from a subject for “Welfare Programs” to “Partners in Development”. The paradigm shift is the result of global factors. India was affected by the world wide women’s movement that culminated into the year 1975, being declared International Year of Women by the United Nations. As a signatory, to UN’s International Year for Women, in 1975 Government of India recommitted itself with renewed energy for the development of women.

The approach to women’s development in India was through the development plans. The mapping of the development plans and policies and programs reveals the ever-evolving efforts at women’s development and empowerment and is akin to Fred Riggs model of development administration theory. In the context of Indian women development and attempt to empowerment happened simultaneously.

Women were empowered through multiple programs that oscillated between political, social, health, education and livelihood, firstly to improve their status and help them move up the family and societal ladder and secondly, to encourage them to have a voice and participate in the decision-making process.

Development Plans and Women

Development of women received attention of the Government right from the very First Plan (1951-56). However, women were treated as a subject of ‘welfare’ and clubbed together with the welfare of the disadvantaged groups like destitute, disabled, aged, etc. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) identified the problem of absence of any governmental machinery at most levels for welfare related activities and undertook to promote a number of welfare measures through voluntary organizations, encouraging women’s organizations to take up such activities in partnership with the government. Promotion of organizations of women at various levels, especially at the grassroots, was at the heart of this strategy. Mahila Mandals were promoted as delivery mechanisms for essential services of education, health especially maternal and child health

etc. both by the CSWB and the Community Development Program through the first and the second Five Year Plans.

This combination of institution building and human resource development was also expected to prepare women to participate in the political and developmental processes. Thus, though the language of these strategies reflected contemporary meaning of 'welfare' there was a conceptual thrust (even though inadequately articulated) towards actively involving and stimulating the participation of women's organizations in the processes of change. However, as envisaged, the women's participation did not take place largely due to the top-down approach and the trickle down theory, which did restrict women's participation and failed to promote gender equality.

The Second to Fifth Plans (1956-79) continued to reflect the very same welfare approach, besides giving priority to women's education, by formulating Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59). However, the planners, failed to address the major problems of poverty, illiteracy, non-enrollment, and drop out etc., and thus women continued to languish at the bottom of the family and society pyramid and stayed away from the mainstream.

The government, took measures to improve women's health through schemes such as Maternal and child health program. This umbrella program envisioned to check the maternal mortality rates, infant mortality rates, malnourishment and morbidity. The service extended to maternal and child health services, supplementary feeding for children and expectant and nursing mothers. With the passage of time, family planning services were introduced within the health services; the family planning services very quickly and increasingly dominated the health services, with separate allocations and staff. Programs for supplementary nutrition of children and nursing and expectant mothers from disadvantaged groups were introduced by the Welfare Department but received far less priority and resources and no integration with Maternal & Child Health (MCH).

Around the same time the second wave of feminism also challenged the women's development theory; and India was not untouched by the global winds of changes. These approaches were attacked for criticism in the report of the *Committee on the Status of Women in India* (1974-75).

The Committee pointed out that plans for development of agriculture, industry, fishery, livestock and other major sectors of the Indian economy contained no acknowledgement of the millions of women involved in these sectors for their livelihood.

In fact, women had been increasingly viewed by the planners as not in need of an independent livelihood, to the point where women's decreasing work participation rate and share of employment, increasing poverty and insecurity in sectors of the economy in which they used to dominate earlier (agriculture, forestry, livestock, cottage industry, sericulture, fisheries, retail), were not even viewed as unfortunate problems of change.

This process of marginalization of the large majority of women in the economy and their consequent neglect and devaluation by the society and the State, were demonstrations of gender and urban bias. Treating the declining sex ratio as a composite indicator of the worsening situation of the majority of women, the Committee demonstrated that this process, begun much earlier, had been accelerated during the period of planned development.

The increasing investment on education, health and the opening of opportunities for public employment had benefited a small minority, widening the gap between this minority and the majority of women. Even amongst the privileged minority, the promise of gender equality was threatened by escalation of social practices like dowry, continued inequality in personal laws (including Hindu Law which had been 'reformed' after independence) non-enforcement of existing laws, which sought to offer some protection to women (e.g. labour laws, criminal law), and the 'invisibility' of women's needs, concerns and perspectives in the planning. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on population control, highlighted women's reproductive, rather than their productive roles, influencing 'populationist' approach to women's development needs.

It was only between 1977 and 1980 that some serious exercises in policy review were taken up. The most significant exercises were the Report of the Working Group on Employment of Women, 1977-78; Report of the Working Group on Development of Village Level Organizations of Rural Women, 1977-78, Report of the Working Group on Adult Education Programs for Women, 1977-78 and Report of the National Committee on the Role and Participation of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, 1979-80.

These exercises undeniably marked a watershed in conceptualizing basic problems and strategies for women's development in India. In fact, the Indian agenda even got incorporated into the United Nations and Mid-Decade Program of Action through the immediacy of the Non-aligned Movement at the special Conference on Women and Development (Baghdad, 1979) and India's Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women (1978-80) as well as the Preparatory Committee for the Mid-Decade, Copenhagen Conference (1980) and Program of Action.

The conceptual approach evolved through these, identified women's developmental needs as having multiple dimensions, cutting across economic, social and political sectors- requiring explicit examination of women's situation in various sectors of agriculture and allied fields, industry, labour and employment, power, environment, energy, science and technology as well as the social and infra-structural sectors. Such explicit examination called for three operational strategies such as i) Establishing cells within various sectoral development/planning agencies at different levels; ii) Earmarking of a share of various sectoral allocations for investment in women rather than relegate women to only women-specific programs and women-specific agencies; and iii) Promoting rural employment and development through women's own collective organizations, at the grassroots. The spontaneous indigenous models of such organizations had already emerged through the work of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Women World Foundation (WWF), Annapoorna Mahila Mandal. The economic, social and political dynamism these organizations displayed offered hopes of empowerment for others elsewhere.

The policymakers wholeheartedly recognized the need for greater participation of women in all the sphere of her public and personal life. The government of India was put under pressure by national and international

forumstoact.Thevariouspolicyreviewcommitteesespecially,theNationalCommitteeonthestatusofwomen in India, (GOI 1974), and the Blue Print of Action Points and the National Plan of Action for women (1976), forced the government to recognize women as “active participants in development”. The UN declaration of the period 1974-84 as the International decade of women, made the clamoring at home for women to be active participants, made the situation even better, acted a major influencer. The Non- Aligned Movement (NAM) conference on Women and Development in its report, titled "*Women Resources and Power*" contained many of the lessons of possible generation of employment, reduction of poverty, education, improvement of productivity and women's empowerment through the strategy of increased investment in collective organizations of poor rural women, building on their existing expertise and skills at the initial stage.

The Sixth Plan (1980-85) saw a shift from welfare to development. The developmental programs were redirected to raising the economic and social status of women, including targeted schemes. Accordingly, the Sixth Plan adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment. In suggesting the need for "administrative innovation" and "collection of sex-wise distribution data on development assistance", the Plan acknowledged the previous neglect, the need for better information flow and new mechanisms to ensure women receive their "due share" of government's attention and support and "equal opportunity for growth and distributive justice". Support for organizations of rural women was suggested on the same principles as organizations of the rural poor – to improve their "bargaining power and access to development assistance".

This plan sought strengthening of voluntary organizations of women at the grassroots and for creating a proper climate for the introduction of social legislation as well as for its effective implementation and the provisio

of legal aid. Such grassroots organizations "as channels for women to participate effectively in decisions that affect their lives and for promoting adequate development efforts for women at different levels", were felt necessary. There were definite suggestions for active promotion of such collectives by the government and linking them with institutions which could provide support in various forms. For education the emphasis was on special support services to expand women's access to all types of education. The need for child care services as a support for education of girls as well as for working mothers of different classes was acknowledged and public services requested to provide them for their women colleagues.

As result, the chapter on women and development in the Sixth Plan resulted in the introduction of schemes specifically oriented to their needs and the incorporation of special components in various others. These background events encouraged the *Department of Rural Development and Women and Child Development and Ministry of Labour and Employment* to adopt some bold measures. The Department of Rural Development midway through the 6th Plan introduced a 30 percent quota for women in all anti-poverty programs for the rural areas. In addition to the women-specific experimental program of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas on the recommendation of special task force appointed by the Department of Rural Development for mandatory inclusion of gender sensitization in all training of public servants of all categories, steps were initiated to begin gender sensitization as a mandatory part of training of rural development officials. The government had also converted the Division for Women's Welfare and Development, till then a part of the Ministry of Social Welfare; into a full Department of Women and Child Development and transferred it to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985.

The programs such as “The integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), Development of Women and Child

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employ... and welfare. Specific strategies were spelt out to
operationalize the governments’ concern for women’s equality, improving their economic status
and empowering them with a greater voice in decision making processes.

Integrated Rural Development Program

(IRDP): Integrated Rural Development Program, a major Self Employment Program for poverty alleviation in the world, was introduced during 1978-79 with an objective to enable identified rural poor families to cross the poverty line by providing them productive assets and inputs in the primary, secondary or tertiary sector through financial assistance by way of Government of subsidy and term credit from financial institutions. The scheme was merged in Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) which was introduced w.e.f., 1.4.1999. Under the program around 40 percent women headed families were covered.

The new National Education Policy 1986 marked occasion for gender advocacy. The continued efforts of women’s organizations and women’s studies groups and internal struggle within government – resulted in the incorporation of two paragraphs on Education for Women’s Equality within the National Policy on Education. For the first time it carried the message that along with expanding women’s access to all kinds of education, the system, with all its institutions, had to shoulder a major responsibility for genuine empowerment of women, by changing the social construction of gender. The reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, marked another breakthrough in the history of women development and empowerment in India.

In the year 1988, the government launched two programs one Mahila Samkhyas, in pursuance of the goal of the new Education Policy (1986) and the Programs of Action as a concrete program for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups. Second, the National Perspective Plan (NPP) for Women, the NPP wanted

increase in women's participation and presence at decision-making levels – in local self-government bodies, state assemblies and Parliament; suggesting a 30 percent reservation at all these levels. The women's reservation bill, three decades since NPP's suggestion, is yet to be enacted as law and is currently in Parliament.

The eighth plan (1992-

1997) was formulated against the backdrop of the New Economic Policy which brought about a process of macro-economic stabilization and structural adjustment processes. The eighth plan with human development as its major focus played a very important role in the development of women. It promised to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors do not by-pass women, implement special program to complement the general development programs and to monitor the flow of benefits to women from other development sectors and enable women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process.

The new features of the section on Women's Development are a paragraph on violence against women and a two-page "Situational Analysis" – which highlights the problems of higher mortality, lower education and increasing unemployment of women, "the conceptual methodological and perception" biases regarding value of women's work, compounded by women's concentration in the informal sector, resulting in casualization, non-protection of labour laws and inaccessibility to credit, technology and other types of development assistance.

The strategy in the eighth plan was to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not sidestep women and special programs are implemented to complement the general programs. The strategy of formation and strengthening of grassroots organizations to articulate local women's needs and their role in decentralized planning and implementation was reiterated, convergence and integration of services offered by health, education, employment and welfare programs at the grass roots level was emphasized. Most importantly, there was a paragraph on the girl child with the promise of 'special programs'. Education and nutrition, legal literacy and "changes in social attitudes and perceptions in regard to the role of women" were mentioned as essential for empowerment. However, women were

mentioned only in the context of women specific programs. There was no mention of a women's quota or an earmarked share of allocations. The most dramatic development during this period was the passing of the 73rd and 74th (Constitutional) Amendment Acts in 1992 which conferred constitutional status on the institutions of local governance, mandated regular elections and wider powers/resources and reserved one-third of seats for women, including among the already reserved categories of SCs/STs and office bearers at different levels of these bodies.

The *ninth plan (1997-2002)* declared the **Empowerment of Women** as one of the nine primary objectives of

the plan and the transfer of control of social infrastructure in the public sphere to women's groups as a strategy

of the Plan. The plan envisaged that every effort will be made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with the man. It was pledged that an integrated approach will be adopted towards empowering women through convergence of

existing services, resources, infrastructure and manpower available in both women-

specific and women related sectors. To this effect, ninth plan directed both Centre and states to adopt a special strategy of 'Women Component Plan' through which not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits are earmarked by all for women-related sectors. It further directed for women's component plan as a part of the plan of each sector to identify the flow of benefits to and impact of plans and programs on women.

Organizing women into Self Help Groups marks the beginning of a major process of empowering women, the institutions thus developed, it was foreseen would provide a permanent forum for articulating their needs and contributing their perspectives to development. Recognizing the fact that women have been socialized only to take a back seat in public life, affirmative action through deliberate strategies needed to be initiated to provide equal access to and control over factors contributing to such empowerment, particularly in the areas of health, education, information, lifelong learning for self-development, vocational skills, employment and income generating activities, land and other forms of property including through inheritance, common property, resources, credit, technology and markets etc.

TheTenthPlan(2002-

2007),throughaseriesofmeasuresforwomenfarmersensuredhouseholdfoodsecurity and women's empowerment. It focused on increasing work opportunities and productivity of women farmers. By increasing women's access to productive land by regularizing leasing and sharecropping of uncultivated agricultural land by women's groups, encouraging collective efforts in bringing wastelands under cultivation and providing policy incentives to women in low-input subsistenceagriculture.

TheEleventhPlanwithobjectiveofinclusivegrowthstrategyforthefirsttimeinthehistoryofIndianplanning attemptedtomovebeyondempowermentandrecognizewomenasagentsofsustainedsocio-economicgrowth and change. The Plan acknowledged women's agencies and tried to ensure that their needs, rights and contribution are reflected in every section of the plan document. Gender is, therefore, a cross cutting theme;it is not confined to a single chapter on Women and Children. It envisioned to develop an integrated approach which would eventually dispense the need for a separate chapter. While endeavoring to guarantee the rights andentitlementsofallwomen,theeleventhplanrecognizedthatwomenarenotahomogenouscategory.T heir situations, and consequently requirements, differ based on their locations within various castes, communities, religions, geographic and development zones and the effort during the Plan period was to cater to all these differential and specific requirements.

The vision of the Twelfth Plan is faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth. Inclusive growth is viewed as a growth process which is seen to be 'fair' by different socio-economic groups that constitute our society. It intensivelyworkedtowardsendingofgender-basedinequities,discriminationandallformsofviolenceagainst girls and women. This is fundamental to enabling women participate fully in the development process, and in fulfilling their social, economic, civil and political rights. This is to take us closer to SDGs, if not completely achievethem.

National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) replacing the Planning Commission, India has moved away from the planned economy. The vision document for 2017-22 titled 'Strategy for New India @75', is an outcome of 2018 economic survey. Under the strategy, "gender" are listed objectives, for women's development and, include i) To create an enabling environment,

sans institutional and structural barriers; and

ii) To enhance the female labour force participation rate to at least 30 per cent by 2022-23.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, also implements a few innovative schemes besides formulating policies and programs; enacts/amends legislations affecting women and coordinates the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to raise the overall status of women on par with that of men. The programs of the Department include i) empowering strategies; ii) employment and income generation; iii) welfare and support services; iv) awareness generation and gender sensitization and v) other enabling measures. These programs play the role of being both supplementary and complementary to the other general development programs in the sectors of health, education, labour and employment, rural and urban development, etc.

The means to empower the women, under the various schemes of the Ministry has been primarily through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The SHGs be it Indira Mahila Yojna launched in 1995 or its recast Syamsidha (2001) or the redesigned avatar of National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) into Mahila Shakti Kendra, are pivotal to empowering strategies. The huge numbers of SHGs in India are indicative of the prominence the collective is accorded in the government's scheme of empowerment, especially the economic empowerment of women in India.

Women's Empowerment Programs in India

A. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)

The inadequacies of the IRDP, especially delay in reaching or not reaching of assistance to women soon came to fore. The government was steadfast on its commitment of women empowerment and development. It initiated the **“Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas”** (DWCRA) scheme in 1982. The scheme received support from the central and state governments and the UNICEF.

The program started with an objective to raise income level of the rural women of poor households so as to enable their organized participation in social development towards economic self-reliance to improve women's access to basic services of Health, Education, Sanitation, Child care and Nutrition etc., through group formation.

Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)

A centrally sponsored scheme Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment

(TRYSEM) was launched by the Government of India by the Department of Rural Development on 15th August 1979. To provide training facilities and create self-

Asapilotproject,DWCRAwasfirstintroducedin500blocks,in50 districts of different States. The DWCRA is considered to be one of the most successful programs aimed at women's economic empowerment by governments in several IndianStates.

The DWCRA Program brought together 15 to 20 women in a group through village level organizers with a viewtotakingupeconomicallyviableactivities,usingtheirownsavingsandcreditalongwitharevolvingfund asabasis.AlthoughtheDWCRA schemewasnotentirelysuccessful,ithelpedintheinitiationofseveralother programs through village level women's groups (Ramaswamy,1996).

More importantly, the DWCRA Program was aimed at poor women in rural areas accessing credit facilities from institutions like banks through bank linkages facilitated by government functionaries along with access and information about other development programs. The DWCRA Program began as a sub-scheme of the IRDP, following sustained lobbying by women's groups for a greater percentage of lending to women. Following stagnation in funding in the early 1990's, has been merged with SGSY

B. Women Development Program (WDP)

In 1984, the government of Rajasthan initiated a unique program "**Women Development Program**" (WDP). The program, a consortium of the government, voluntary groups and research institutions aimed at strengthening women's organizations and their involvement in development processes at the grass roots.

The WDP, set up by the government of Rajasthan is a response to non –deliverance of hitherto development programs and the attempts to channel resources to women, to change their status for better. *"It also took note of the fact that men had been entrusted with the responsibility for women's development in the family, government and society far too long"* (Dighe and Jain, 1989). Women empowerment 'or' development was defined as bringing about a change in women's self – image through a collective process at the grass roots level; as providing them a space of their own and greater control over the conditions that determine their life.

The WDP was based on the premise that if women's empowerment had to be achieved speedily and on a large scale, State patronage and legitimacy were needed (Bhaiya et al, 1994). The backbone of the program were village level workers called 'Sathins' and middle-level workers called 'Prachetas', who together motivated, encouraged and organized women at grass root to bring pressure on various delivery systems such as, primary health centres, local schools and ration shops to function more effectively. The evaluation of the program, brought to the fore the need for organizational strategies to empower women based on an understanding of the "Specific Social Context in which women find themselves". "If it were not for their specific efforts, the riddle of resources never reaching needy women would not have been resolved at all" (Jain et al, 1986).

The DWCRA and WDP experiments at the grass roots served as an eye opener and revealed that the women have been denied developmental inputs because they do not own any asset and therefore do not have any formal status within the household.

C. The Mahila Samakhya Program (MS)

The outcome of the WDP encouraged, the Government of India's MoHRD's department of education to roll out another innovative program, "**Mahila Samakhya**". The program initiated in 1989, had a defined plan i.e. "**Empowerment of Women**", although inspired by WDP, this program was different from it in both content and structure.

The MS program initially rolled out in 10 districts of the three states namely Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat and later scaled to 126 districts in seven states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Uttarakhand. The MS program is registered as an independent society in every State. The MS is neither a State nor a voluntary body. It was designed to be a decentralized experiment, and body that would evolve as it grows, in that terms MS program was unstructured and open, without any targets or time frames.

MS, to counter powerlessness of women had formed village level women's collectives called

Sanghas. The sanghas, were a means to collective power to enable women to plan, implement and direct their own empowerment, especially education. The sanghas were supported by facilitators called Sayoginis. The Sayogini motivated women to come together at the place and time suitable to them and helped them to identify issues and come up with an action plan to change their destination. It was perceived that this shared learning would plug in the gaps in the programs and help them to reach the unreached.

The MS program was envisaged would create demand through various Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities and thus put pressure on the supply side i.e. the service provider be it education, health, gender specific programs. The MS program was implemented in a campaign mode to have a wider reach and impact. The program campaign was led by numerous women's groups with different ideological leanings around issues that affect their lives. The wide range of issues included a) equal employment opportunities; b) equal wages for same and equal work; c) right to resources; d) prevention against and right to raise voice against domestic violence; e) Women's right to reproductive choices; f) right to safe environment; and g) rights to participate in decision making and role in electoral politics.

The campaigns led by several autonomous women's groups and as part of larger mass-based movements challenged the inadequacy and injustice of development processes for not addressing women's realities and needs while also challenging the development paradigm of the State.

D. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

The acronym SEWA literally means Service. The group since its formation in 1972, is serving women as an organization and a movement. SEWA emerged in response to the expressed needs of women workers in the unorganized sector who had largely been uncounted, undercounted and hidden or invisible by male dominated trade union movements. SEWA adopted the term "Self-Employed Workers" to counter the labels of 'unorganized' 'informal' 'unprotected' or 'marginal' that were applied to a large section of the workforce, constituted by women. SEWA organized women workers to achieve

their goals of full employment and self-reliance through the strategy of struggle and development. The struggle is against the many constraints and limitations imposed on them by society and the economy, while development activities strengthen women's bargaining power and offer them new alternatives. Over the years, SEWA the organization has become a movement. A movement synonymous with the empowerment of women, a movement enhanced by its being a sangam or confluence of three movements: the labor movement, the cooperative movement and the women's movement. But it is also a movement of self-employed workers: their own, home-grown movement with women as the leaders¹.

Through their own movement women become strong and visible. Their tremendous economic and social contributions are recognized with globalization, liberalization and other economic changes.

E. The other empowerment programs and other ministries' program to empower women

While the onus of empowering women with a large number of schemes remained with Department of Women and Child Development, conscious efforts have been made by other ministries such as Ministry of Tribal

¹<http://www.sewa.org> accessed on April 25, 2020

Affairs, Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare. Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Commerce and Labour also developed programs with special components for women in their programs.

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)

A centrally sponsored scheme 'Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment' - (TRYSEM) was launched by the Government of India by the Department of Rural Development on 15th August 1979, to provide training facilities and create self-employment among rural unemployed youths. It was a component of IRDP. It was later merged under umbrella scheme SGSY.

Supply of Improved Tools for Rural Artisans (SITRA)

Started in July 1992, the scheme was introduced to modernize and improve the efficiency and productivity of the poor rural artisans. Under the scheme, 40 percent of the beneficiaries were women.

For several socio – economic schemes, apex organizations like the Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) etc. provide funds, training and marketing support. Financial institutions such as National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), provide subsidy and credit facilities. The 1988, National Perspective Plan for Women, developed 27 different schemes, some of these schemes were for “women only”, while the others scheme involved both men and women.

F. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

The Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), was started with effect from 1st April, 1999. The scheme considered a holistic one covered all the aspects of self-employment such as organization of the poor into Self Help Groups, training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. SGSY replaced IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRS, SITRA, Ganga Kalyan Yojana and Million Wells Scheme etc.

The scheme aimed at establishing a large number of micro enterprises in the rural areas. The objective of SGSY was to provide sustainable income to the poorest of the poor people living in the rural areas of the country and bring assisted families above the poverty line within three years by providing them income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and Government subsidy. The rural poor such as those with land, landless labour, educated unemployed, rural artisans and disabled were covered under the scheme and focused on vulnerable section of the rural poor.

The “Swarozgaris” as the beneficiaries were addressed under the scheme, had to be from the identified vulnerable section i.e. SC/ST 50 percent, Women 40 percent and the disabled 3 percent of those assisted.²

² SGSY Guidelines

The implementation of SGSY during 1999 to 2009 brought up a mixed bag of learning. SGSY implementation

brought to focus shortcomings like uneven mobilization of rural poor and formation of SHGs across the States, insufficient capacity building of beneficiaries, low credit mobilization and lack of professionals to implement the program. On the other hand, the experience amply validated the need for the poor to be organized into SHGs and SHG federations as a prerequisite for poverty reduction and the social and economic empowerment

of rural poor. Further, the program

had also apparently reached a level of maturity and it was necessary to take it to the next phase where it could acquire inter and intradepartmental/ministerial and sectoral linkages along with revised economic package of assistance. The situation warranted higher order flexibility and a focus on targets and outcomes. Accordingly, SGSY was restructured, based largely on the recommendations of the Radhakrishna Committee (IRMA, 2017).

G. National Rural Livelihood Mission

The GoI accepted the recommendation of the Radhakrishna Committee and restructured the SGSY into National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in FY 2010–2011 to provide a sharper and greater focus as well as momentum for poverty elimination. The years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 were the transition years as both SGSY and NRLM were implemented; complete transition of SGSY to NRLM took place with effect from 1st April, 2013. The SGSY also aimed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. The framework for implementation for DAY-NRLM was approved by the Ministry on 9th December, 2010. The Mission was formally launched on 3rd June, 2011. In November 2015, the program was renamed *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission* (DAY-NRLM).

NRLM implementation is in a Mission Mode. This enables (a) shift from the present allocation based strategy to a **demand driven strategy** enabling the states to formulate their own livelihoods-based poverty reduction action plans, (b) focus on targets, outcomes and time bound

delivery, (c) continuous capacity building, imparting requisite skills and creating linkages with livelihoods opportunities for the poor, including those emerging in the organized sector, and (d) monitoring against targets of poverty outcomes. As NRLM follows a demand driven strategy, the States have the flexibility to develop their livelihoods-based perspective plans and annual action plans for poverty reduction.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development

The broad mandate of the Ministry of Women and Child Development is to have a holistic development of women and children. The ministry's mission is twofold³ 1. to promote safety, social and economic empowerment women through cross-cutting policies and programs, mainstreaming gender concerns, creating awareness about their rights and facilitating institutional and legislative support for enabling them realize their human rights and develop to their full potential; 2. Ensuring development, care and protection of children

³ <https://wcd.nic.in/about-us/about-ministry> Website accessed on December 15, 2019.

through cross-cutting policies and programs, spreading awareness about their rights and facilitating access to learning, nutrition, institutional and legislative support for enabling them to grow and develop to their full potential.

The ministry envisions empowered woman living with dignity and contributing as equal partners in development in an environment free from violence and discrimination. And, well nurtured children with full opportunities for growth and development in a safe and protective environment.

The ministry acting as a nodal ministry, promotes inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral convergence to create gender equitable and child centered legislation, policies and programs. All these programs play a supplementary and

Social Empowerment: Create an enabling environment through adopting various policies and programs for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potential.

complementary role to the other general developmental programs in the sectors of health, education, rural development etc. All these efforts are directed to ensure that a women are empowered (legal, political, economic and social) and thus become equal partners in national development along with men.

The working group on women's agency and empowerment⁴ advocated a shift from mere 'income' poverty of women to the adoption of a 'multi-dimensional' approach to poverty and wellbeing. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) complements the income poverty measures by reflecting all the other deprivations with respect to education, health and living standard that a poor person simultaneously faces. It assesses poverty at the individual level, with poor persons being those who face multiple deprivations, and the extent of their poverty being measured by the range of their deprivations.

The Twelfth Plan worked towards making a transition from viewing women as 'victims' of poverty to empowering them to change the contexts in which they live. And redefined poverty as not only lack of material resources but also lack of power and choice. This shift in definition of poverty and empowerment contrasts the hitherto narrow view which identified development with growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rise in personal incomes, industrialization and technological advancement.

⁴ XII five-year plan Report of the working group on Women's Agency and Empowerment, MWCD, Govt. of India.

The last of the five years plans, the 12th Plan (2012-2017) emphasized on the need for national programs to move beyond addressing income poverty and include an expanded response so that the income generated is used to create capacities that enhance freedoms and choices. Further the plan identified the thrust areas, that include i) Economic Empowerment;

ii) Social Empowerment; iii) Gender Based Violence; iv) Women in Governance; v) Focus on vulnerable women; vi) Gender Response Budgeting; and lastly vii) institutional arrangements at

Economic Empowerment: The working group acknowledged economic independence as the vital feature to improve women's position within the family and society, it consequently laid emphasis on increasing women's access to and control over resources. It includes increasing their work force participation and importantly, improving the quality of women's work and ensuring their upward mobility on the economic ladder.

Social Empowerment: The group looked at social empowerment encompassed all the factors important for the wellbeing of women health, education, housing, drinking water, sanitation and energy.

Gender Based Violence: To arrest gender-based violence and discrimination against women, the working group highlighted the women's right to dignity, equality, freedom and bodily integrity. The five-year period starting 2012-2017 worked to provide a safe and protective environment to women both in the public and private arena.

Women in Governance: The group agreed the need to go beyond affirmative action in terms of reservation for ensuring women's political representation for promoting women's leadership and their participation in governance.

Focus on Vulnerable Women: The diversity of women's situations and the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices make certain categories of women particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. The working group acknowledged the needs of specially disadvantaged groups such as Dalit, Tribal, and Women

The 12th Plan 2012-2017, made transition of women's empowerment from the lens of mere income to a more encompassing "women's access" to participation in work and wellbeing. It did not view women as "victims" of poverty from holistic angle and but one who lacks that impact their lives i.e. power and choice. Source: XIIth Plan working group on women's agency and empowerment.

LivingwithHIVandAIDSandmigrantwomen,therefore,thestressonthemeasuresandprogramstoaddress the issues faced bythem.

Gender Response Budgeting: Gender Responsive Budgeting or Gender Budgeting as it is more commonly

known,isameansofensuringthatpublicresourcesareallocatedinanequitablewaysothatthemostpressing

needs of specific gender groups are satisfied. The group agrees, unless an affirmative action is taken, the unequal economic and social status of women may be perpetuated.

Institutional Arrangements: Stressed on the need to strengthen the National Women's Machineries for achieving women's empowerment. This includes the MWCD as the nodal Ministry and its attached and autonomous organizations, National Commission for Women (NCW), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh(RMK) and operationalizing the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW). Working group envisaged a larger role for the NMEW, to provide a strong impetus for reform by catalyzing the existing system, ensuring better coordination and convergence of all development programs impacting women in close collaboration with grassroot structures and enabling participatory approaches and processes.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women

The National Missions for Empowerment of Women or Poorna Shakti Kendras (PSK) was operationalized in 2011-12 for holistic empowerment of women. The NMEW focused on convergence of the efforts through inter-sectoral coordination amongst different ministries and programs, with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) acting as the nodal agency. Under the 12th plan period it functioned as sub scheme of the umbrella Scheme for Protection and Development of Women.

The salient features of the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) are:

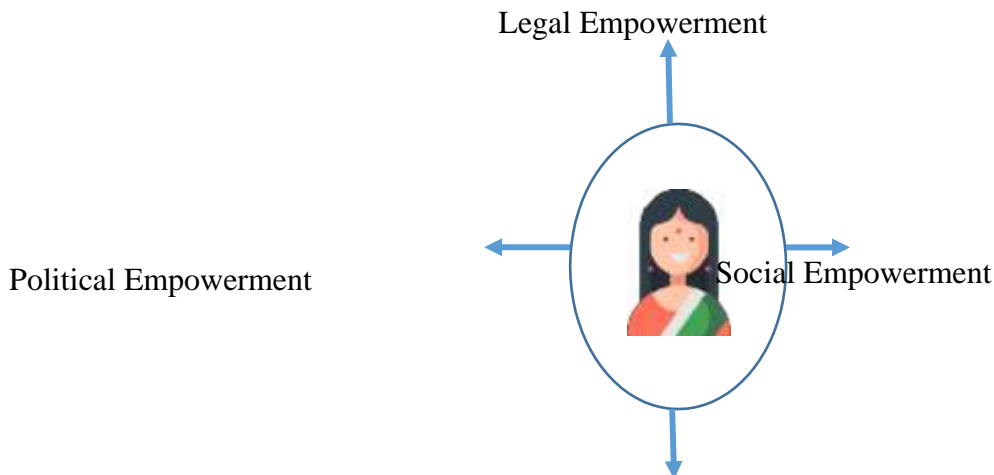
- To ensure economic empowerment of women.
- To ensure that violence against women is eliminated progressively.
- To ensure social empowerment of women with emphasis on health and education.
- To oversee gender mainstreaming of programs, policies, institutional arrangements and processes of participating Ministries, Institutions and Organizations.
- To undertake awareness generation as well as advocacy activities to fuel demand for benefits under

various schemes and programs and create, if required, structures at district, tehsil and village level with the involvement of Panchayats for their fulfillment.

It is envisioned NMEW will achieve gender equality, and gender justice and holistic

development of women through inter-sectoral convergence of programs relating to women, forging synergy between various stakeholders and creating an enabling environment conducive to social change. The all-inclusive model developed for empowerment of women covered all the facets namely legal, political, economic and social and within these facets all the programs for gender by various ministries were brought together.

Model for Holistic Empowerment for Women



Economic Empowerment

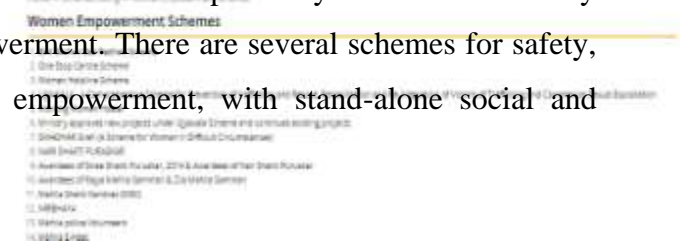
The National Mission for Empowerment of Women Scheme, has been brought under the Mahila Shakti Kendra since 2017-18.

Programs for Empowerment: The Ministry of Women and Child Development

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has several programs for women's empowerment. Women's safety and security remains central to the empowerment and all other schemes revolving around it.



These programs and schemes cross cut and empower women on primarily three fronts namely safety/ gender justice, social and economic empowerment. There are several schemes for safety, and which cross cut both social and economic empowerment, with stand-alone social and economic empowerment programs⁵



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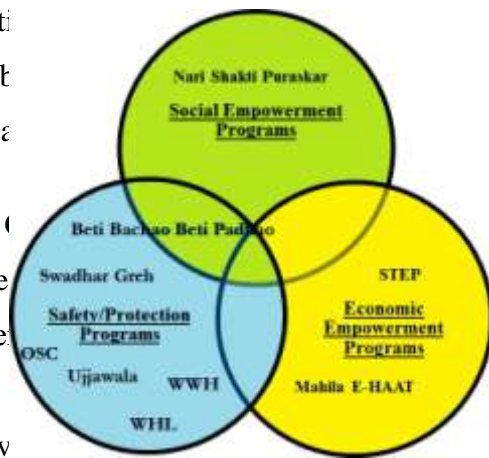
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⁵ As listed on the MWCD website <https://wcd.nic.in/schemes-listing/2405> accessed on December 15, 2019.

Gender Justice Programs⁶

Beti Bacho Beti Padaho: The program was launched in 2015 to arrest the trend of decline of Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and uplift women by ensuring protection and survival of girl child at birth. This program cuts across

gender justice
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heme focuses on celebrating the birth of a girl about our boys. This social campaign creates istricts with alarmingly low sex ratio.

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of Finance set up 'Nirbhaya Fund' the scheme
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women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture will be facilitated with support andredressal.

Women Help Line: The scheme unveiled in 2016 is integrated with OSCs. The aim is to provide integrated supportandassistancetowomenaffectedbyviolence,bothinprivateandpublicspacesunderoneroof.Women affectedbyviolenceandinneedofredressalserviceswillbereferredtoOSCthroughWHL.Underthescheme awomanindistresscanseekforhelpbydialing181,the24by7tollfreenumberfromherpost/pre-paidmobile or landline services through any public or private network i.e. GSM, CDMA, 3G, and 4Getc.

Swadhar Gerh: The scheme caters to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances. This scheme is an extension of Short Stay home Scheme (1969) for women and girls introduced as a social defense mechanism fordestitutewomenlefthomelessduetofamilydiscord,crime, violence,mentalstress,socialostracismorare

Over two decades ago India had ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), thereby committing to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women with its legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt those laws which prohibit discrimination against women. Since then, changes have been made in the law to prevent violence and create a system which rehabilitates women affected by violence and ensure their access to a violence-free life. The Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence 1993 provides a definition of gender-based abuse, calling it "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"

being forced into prostitution and are in moral danger. A new scheme “**SWADHAR**” with similar objective was launched in 2001 by the Department of Women and Child Development. The success of SWADHAR propelled the Government to launch a new scheme called “**SWADHAR GREH**” in 2015. This scheme envisions a supportive institutional framework for women victims of difficult circumstances so that they could lead their life with dignity and conviction.

Ujjawala: The scheme in effect from start of the financial year in 2016 visualizes a holistic system for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The objectives of the scheme include; i) to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation through social mobilization and involvement of local communities, awareness generation programs, generate public discourse through workshops/seminars and such events and any other innovative activity; ii) to facilitate rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody; iii) to provide rehabilitation services both immediate and long-term to the victims by providing basic amenities/needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment including counselling, legal aid and guidance and vocational training; iv) to facilitate reintegration of the victims into the family and society at large; and v) to facilitate repatriation of cross-border victims to their country of origin.

Working Women Hostel : The Government of India being concerned about the difficulties faced by such working women, introduced a scheme in 1972-73 of grant-in-aid for construction of new/expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, small towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist. Based on an evaluation, the existing scheme has been revised to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments.

Social Empowerment Programs

Nari Shakti Puraskar: To commemorate and acknowledge the achievement of Women, the

MoWCD since 2015, has institutionalized “**Nari Shakti Puskar**”. The awards or the puraskars are given to eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment. On International Women’s Day i.e. March 8th, the ministry gives away 20 awards. The awards are given in two categories i) Institutional; and ii) Individual. There are eleven institutional awards and nine individual awards. The award carries a certificate and cash prize of 0.2 million USD each. The awards for the institutions have been named after the great historical women characters of India.

Economic Empowerment Programs

Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP): The STEP program was started in 1986-87. Under the scheme poor and marginalized women are provided training in traditional trades in the informal sectors. The program strives to build upon the traditional knowledge of women and convert it into sustainable livelihood

capacitation. The scheme is availed by any sector for imparting skills related to employability and entrepreneurship as identified by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The trades identified include but not limited are;- 1) Agriculture 2) Horticulture 3) Food Processing 4) handlooms 5) Traditional crafts embroidery, zari, 6) Handicrafts, 7) Gems and Jewelry, and 8) Travel and Tourism, Hospitality.

MahilaE-Haat: The Ministry of Women & Child Development launched “Mahila E-Haat” a bilingual portal in March, 2016. The portal “Mahila E-Haat” is envisaged as a critical component for business efficiency and

to make it available to the majority of Indian women entrepreneurs / SHGs / NGOs. This is a

un- / for supporting women products / services which are for meeting aspirations and needs

of v- **owerment Program**



Ma- declaration by the then finance minister in his budget speech in Parliament. Therein the finance minister said “*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* begins with girl child and women. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) will be set up at village level with an allocation of 500 crores in 14 lakhs ICDS Anaganwadi Centres.” Outlining the aim of the MSK, minister further said, “This will provide one stop convergent support services for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition”⁸.

This scheme is foreseen to provide an interface for rural women to approach for availing their entitlements and forempowering them through training and capacity building. This is a sub-scheme under the umbrella scheme Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shashaktikaran Yojana (PMMSY). The hitherto national mission for empowerment of women is effectively merged with Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme to create an environment in which women realize their full potential, convergent support is proposed for equal access to health care, quality and digital library at Gram

Panchayats level. The scheme aims to strengthen the conceptual and programmatic women centric schemes/ programs implemented by MoWCD and other ministries.

⁸ Excerpts from Mr. Arun Jaitely, Finance Minister Budget speech in Parliament, 2017.

Appreciating that women empowerment is multi-

dimensional, the MSK scheme therefore seeks to provide the services that will build upon by leveraging available resources of variety of schemes/programs of the government at the District/block level.

The primary function of the scheme is to create awareness or demand generation for the various women-centric programs under the various ministries, it is based on the belief, and demand generation would lead to seeking of services through appropriate training and capacity building.

The districts cover under MSK program are the aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog with most backward blocks in the country. In all by the financial year 2019-2020 115 districts and 920 blocks of the country would have been implemented MSK.

Conclusion

The empowerment programs for women in India have evolved over the years and during the course it has learnt

and imbibed from various events within the country and globally. As enshrined in the constitution, the national government sets the agenda, and states take it up from their and adapt it to suit their respective socio-cultural

and economic milieu. As of now the empowerment program of the GoI are aligned to the SDGs and the gender component under the following SDGs, i.e. SDG-

5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and the nine targets; SDG -2 (Zero hunger) target 2 and 3; SDG-3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) target 1-4, 7 and 8; SDG-4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) target 1, 2 and 3; SDG-8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) target 5, 7 and 8; and SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) target 1, 2, 3 and 4. The programs it is envisaged would take India closer to SDGs, if not completely achieve them.

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